

The View from 65: Aging as Preparation for Life

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In 1965, as a Peace Corps teacher in rural Nigeria, I rummaged through my donated Volunteer "book locker" and decided to tackle Winston Churchill's history of World War II. Sweating beneath my sun-scorched tin roof, I found myself strangely seized by this old man's story. At the age of 65, when the world says your race is finished and it's "pasture" time to favor younger, presumably more able men, this "last lion of Britain" becomes Prime Minister and boldly leads his nation through its most dire hour of need.

"As I went to bed around 3 a.m.," he reflects on the evening of his election, "I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with Destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial" (*The Gathering Storm*).

A longing for that supreme confidence stirred in my youthful heart. It's remained there for almost 45 years, surfacing variously over the decades--but never so compellingly as now, at my own 65th birthday. As if to assure my attention, an email the day afterwards from my 50th high school class reunion linked a website listing classmates and noting those "deceased"--including the star quarterback, a special friend, and others I recall from algebra class to sock hops and ball games.

As the darkness of fall beckons both outside and within, the season of evaluation arrives. On Jesus' calendar, in fact, September heralds the New Year--that is, Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement for Jews. It's a time to ask forgiveness for last year's sins, and in that inimitable way, to prepare for the year ahead with a spiritual housecleaning--and wood-chopping. You don't want to be caught unprepared for the coming cold.

It makes sense--far more than honoring some goyish, double-faced god Janus when it's too late, in the middle of **January's** winter. I, for one, am quite literally tired of carrying my sins against others, their sins against me, and the demons that prey upon those transgressions.

Ironically, the very blessing of old age lies here: You don't have the energy any more to run away from your brokenness. As you slow down, the truth catches up to you.

It's not that you get weaker as you get older, but indeed, that weakness is our natural human condition in this fallen world. The physical weakness of aging simply reveals the fact that all of us human beings, no matter how young or fit, are weak unto death in the face of powers beyond our control.

Our natural human strength allows only two choices here. You can let your inadequacy overwhelm you, and withdraw into shame and bitterness. Or, you can deny and cover it up with over-working, alcohol, illicit sex, or other compulsive/ addictive behaviors. Hence, the proverbial "mid-life crisis," which for men often signals a retreat into adolescent fantasies.

The great revelation of aging, meanwhile, is that at the very terrifying limits of our natural abilities, we can seek super-natural help. Thus, the Good News arrives disguised in

weakness--even on a cross--as a graphic invitation to surrender to your Father God and know at last His overcoming strength.

In 1993, when I left pastoring at 49 to be a husband and daddy, write books, and speak at conferences, I wanted to leave with a bang. "Father," I prayed before my final sermon, "give me a powerful parting word for your church here!"

I got what I asked for. One word: "Prepare."

And so I preached about John the Baptist, who returned from his desert sojourn even as the Hebrew slaves from Egypt, to proclaim Isaiah's prophecy, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight the paths for him" (Mark 1:3). That is, "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill laid low" in order that "the glory of the Lord will be revealed" (Isa. 40:4).

The kingdom rule of God, John urged, is at hand (Mark 1:15). Our task, therefore, is not to strive harder after a distant and disapproving Judge, but rather, to make way for the Father who longs to enter our world and our hearts.

Filled with hope, this message yet stirs with challenge. Even today, I urged, God is coming after His people to fulfill His purposes on earth; it's time now to make more room in your hearts for Him to do that, so His glory might be revealed in and through us.

On that definitive note, we left Los Angeles for Santa Barbara. For the next 15 years, I went for it, like John in the wilderness. Well, OK, in this beach resort it's been a little easier than his eating bugs in the desert and wearing scratchy camel hair.... In any case, I exercised, worshipped, read Scriptures, and scheduled prayer partners regularly. I fasted as prompted, begged the Father to surface and uproot my sins, lead me through inner healing of past wounds unto forgiving others. I identified and cast scores of demons out of myself.

I discovered--contrary to popular sentimentality--that time does not heal wounds, but can at best only help to ignore them so they become infected--and indeed, contagious as we displace them onto others closest to us. Rather, Jesus heals wounds, as we place them humbly and deliberately before him.

Over a year ago, I sensed the Father's saying, "The season of preparation is coming to an end." And then, months later, I prayed and could find no more sins to repent of, no more old wounding from sins against me to be healed, no more demons resident within me to be cast out. For days, and then weeks, I waited, prayed, fasted, sought confirmation from trusted others--but nothing else surfaced in that regard.

Sure, I've had other, present sins in my life to deal with, negative thought patterns and dismaying behavior at times, plus proportionate demonic attack--as I suspect we can all anticipate in some measure until the Lord returns. But facing attacks from outside the gates beats rooting the enemy out of your own city.

Overall, I'm becoming more free to receive each day as it comes, to discern what's worth engaging, and move into it as I sense the Spirit's leading--without being either passive or aggressive (though at times voices accuse me of both). Comments and incidents that used to bait me into defensive adversity now hook me less often, and the simple way to reconciliation becomes surprisingly clear. With less emotional and spiritual baggage to carry, I have few agendas beyond discerning what the Father is doing, telling others about it,

and cooperating with Him in it. I'm learning to do my best, and leave God the rest. I find less time for what's good and important as I focus on what's best and essential.

As I take responsibility to clear and level the road that leads from my Father to me, I can trust to Him the road that leads from me to my destiny. You might say--even as Isaiah prophesied--that the Father has been bringing low my mountainous ego with truth, and filling my valleys of shame with grace. I can't say exactly where He's leading me yet (see my Ministry Update below for clues), but that's bothering me less than it used to.

In fact, I'm beginning to think that the Father deliberately does not show us all that lies ahead, not because He's possessive and stingy, but rather, both wise and merciful. We probably wouldn't sign on for His journey if we knew the cost--and even if we did, we'd be hyper-vigilant and unable freely to entertain His Spirit as we walked it out. That holy naiveté serves me well, as it leads me to trust the future to my Father and frees my energies for what He's doing now.

At 65, I'm increasingly aware that decisions have consequences. And so I would urge my younger readers here: Please, decide now--years before I ever caught on at 49--to clear the way for Jesus to enter your heart unreservedly, as a future investment in the Father's holy pension plan. When your natural energy inevitably begins to ebb, you're going to need super-natural energy and vision--even as a booster rocket drops away once it's pushed the satellite into orbit, to depend thereafter on solar energy. Prepare now to recognize and move into your God-ordained calling before the world eventually lays you off.

God wants to reveal His glory in and through us. But He gives us free will either to accommodate the obstacles to that destiny or to engage His power to overcome them. We're not gods, but neither are we sanctified puppets. We're sons and daughters of the living God, who has created us "for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for you to do" (Ephes. 2:8-10).

Jesus is this God's manifest kingdom rule arriving among us, assuring through His Spirit every gift you need to fulfill His calling. I pray you'll make increasing room in your heart now for him to do that--and thereby, reach that confident readiness in your later years to declare with Sir Winston, "All my past life ha(s) been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial."

Ministry Update

In May, I ministered two weeks in Sydney and Perth, Australia, and left confident that leaders there are well able to carry on the Father's heart of healing for His sons "down under." Over the summer, my wife and son accompanied me for a month's ministry in Europe—Germany, Geneva, Milan, and the UK. Each venue had the Father's fingerprints on it. For example, last February, one of my Intercessors' Platoon (see <http://www.abbafather.com/intercessors.html>) went to a conference on the East Coast and at dinner sat next to a young man from Milan, who began talking excitedly about an "American book for men" he'd found, saying that he wished the author could some day come and

minister to the men of Italy. It was *Healing the Masculine Soul*; my friend gave him my email address—and the rest is history. The Italian translation was published and waiting when we got to Milan.

Again, after much confusion and frustration, United Airlines had to re-route our itinerary via Frankfurt. I remembered an old Peace Corp friend of mine who had years ago moved to Marburg, Germany. I checked my atlas and was excited to see it's right near Frankfurt, so I emailed him and he was happy to put us up there on our way to Geneva. Then, when I was in Australia, a German brother ordered a book from my site. I emailed him and asked if he might know of any German translators? He replied that indeed, "the most widely respected" one was a pastor in—are you ready for this? Marburg! I sent the pastor a copy of the book and he's excited about it; I emailed my friend there and he said, "I know him well—we'll have him over for a meal when you're here!" We met, and a German publisher is now considering the book. What can you do but worship?

The French translation is due out just after the New Year. In 2010, conferences in Hong Kong and South Africa are being planned.

So it seems the Father is stirring His sons over the world, and I'm honored and excited to be part of that. Meanwhile, I'm finishing up a series of essays *Facing the Home Front in Spiritual Warfare*, and another *Do Pirates Wear Pajamas? and Other Mysteries in the Adventure of Fathering*.

How to Support This Ministry

Much as I enjoy the writing and international events, they require a lot of time and energy, but do not often produce commensurate income. What's more, their scope and potential impact for the Kingdom is considerable, so the warfare in my life is proportionate. I just turned 65, and do not qualify for Social Security because I could never afford to pay into it sufficiently. If you feel moved to support this ministry with prayer and/or tax-deductible contributions, please go to my site Home Page "Ministry Support" link at http://www.abbafather.com/ministry_support.html

All support will be gratefully received.

Ministry Resources

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